

# Working Smoke Alarms, Home Escape Plans Can Save Your Life

When you changed your clocks on April 3 to daylight-saving time, did you remember to change the batteries in your smoke alarms? Do you test your smoke alarms monthly to ensure they are working properly? Has your family designed and practiced a home escape plan?

The following recommendations from the Kansas State Fire Marshal and Safe Kids Kansas will help prevent house fires and prepare your family in case fire ever breaks out in your home:

- Keep matches, lighters and other heat sources out of the reach of children. Teach your children that lighters and matches are tools, not toys. Playing with matches and lighters is a leading cause of fire deaths and injuries for children ages 5 and under.
- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home and outside every sleeping area, test them once a month, replace the batteries at least once a year and replace the alarms every 10 years. Many consumers are choosing to purchase the new 10-year smoke alarms that do not require battery replacement every year. Consider installing both ionization alarms that are better at sensing flaming fires, and photoelectric alarms that are better at sensing slow, smoky fires. There are also new dual mode alarms available that sense both types of fires.
- Plan and practice two escape routes out of each room in your home. Designate an outside meeting place. Make sure children know exactly what to do in case of fire. An unprepared child will most likely attempt to hide from the fire. Remember you have only seconds after the smoke alarm sounds to escape safely. Fire drills should be practiced at all hours, even at night since 50 percent of all fire deaths in Kansas occur in the home between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m.
- Teach your children to crawl low on their hands and knees under smoke. Eighty-seven percent of all childhood fire-related deaths are from smoke inhalation, caused by the toxic gases produced as fires develop and spread.
- Tell children to never re-enter a burning structure, not even for a favorite toy or pet. Call 911 or your local fire department from a neighbor's home, cell phone or any phone outside the burning structure.

KDHE's Risk Communication Specialist, Mike Cameron, worked for the Kansas State Fire Marshal for over three years before transferring to KDHE. "Fire professionals will all tell you that there is nothing more tragic than a fire death in a home without a working smoke alarm," Cameron said. "Smoke alarms can be purchased for as little as \$5, and the thought that someone died because of the lack of a smoke alarm or a \$2 battery is a bitter pill to swallow."

Nearly 94 percent of the homes in the U.S. have smoke detectors, but 20 percent don't work due to dead or missing batteries. A working smoke detector coupled with a well-rehearsed escape plan greatly increases a family's chance of surviving a fire in the home.

Are you and your family prepared to save yourselves from a fire in your home?

More information about fire safety in the home is available on the National Fire Protection Association's Web site at: <http://www.nfpa.org/>.

